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THE BOLSHEVIK BEE

By M. H. TEMPLE

MAN is a very prejudiced animal; like all his fellow-vertebrates, except the dog, he judges all other creatures by their usefulness or otherwise to himself, and their intelligence by its subservience to his own. Because his young do not need living but paralysed tissues for their sustenance, the almost miraculous surgery of the *Sphex* entirely fails to excite his admiration, even when he knows of it, which is not often the case, and since the anæsthetic secreted by the glow-worm has never yet been utilized in human clinics, or, for the matter of that, yet been identified by human science, that interesting beetle remains to him merely an insect which emits a rather curious light. Nine men out of ten exalt the intelligence of the dog above that of the cat, not perceiving that their judgment is altogether vitiated by the personal equation, and that they are really placing extreme servility above a fine sense of independence. They assume the dog to be the more "intelligent" animal of the two because the dog does what they want and shows signs of pleasure in the process, while they write down the cat as the less "intelligent" because the cat aims at what she wants, mostly with singular success, and does not care a brass farthing about their opinion so long as they refrain from throwing things. The dog, an undiscerning courtier, fawns on the master; the cat, with a much keener appreciation of *Realpolitik*, pays his addresses to the cook; and in the deluded family the dog is judged the wiser animal of the two, which, as Euclid somewhere or other observes, "is absurd."

But in nothing is this influence of the

human equation more apparent than in our attitude toward the bee. It is, I admit, modified by the bee's possession of a sting and an uncertain temper, but, on the whole, these drawbacks are forgotten in the contemplation of the insect as an expert confectioner and chandler, the producer of those two admirable commodities, honey and wax. That fact makes an irresistible appeal to humanity, with the result that the bee is held up to us by our pastors and masters as an object of admiration instead of the awful example she really is. It is difficult to discuss the intelligence of the bee, because, whatever it is, the intelligence of all insects is so utterly different from our own, in kind as well as in degree, that there is no common ground between us, and M. Bergson is probably right in saying that, while it is quite possible we may at some future date exchange ideas with the inhabitants of other planets, we shall never do so with our own insects. Their entire thinking apparatus—supposing them to think at all in our sense of the word—is arranged on a plan so unlike ours, and their organs of sense have so little relation to our own, that all we can be sure about them is that between their mental processes and those of all animals, including ourselves, there is an impassable gulf, and that the universe as they apprehend it must be quite different from that which we perceive. We see the results of this difference in the strange juxtaposition of acts which seem to demand reason of a very high order, or at least instinct of superlative accuracy and delicacy, side by side with others which appear almost incredibly stupid.

However, for want of a better word,

let us agree for the time being to speak of the "intelligence" of the bee. Competent observers would not, I think, place it quite so high as that of the ant, which attains to the keeping of pets as well as cows and slaves, but it is still very high, and in this regard the bee has a right to claim an exalted position in the insect world. Her patriotism is intense, her social instinct is far more highly developed than the same quality among ourselves—though when it breaks down it breaks down utterly—and the ingenuity with which she has solved certain problems of sex and mathematics is supreme. It is common knowledge, for instance, that of the three figures the equilateral triangle, the square, and the hexagon, which can be packed together without interstices, the hexagon, the form adopted by the bee in constructing her cell, is very much the strongest, and that labour and material are best economized when the basis of each cell is formed from three planes of adjacent cells. But the saving will vary with the angle at which the three planes meet, and Reaumur, who set König the problem as an exercise in mathematics, was so good as to compliment the bee on having solved it within a minute decimal. Subsequently MacLaurin went over the calculation again with the somewhat surprising result that the bee was proved to have been, not almost, but absolutely right, and that the error was on the side of the human mathematician.

So far, the reader will observe that all that has been said is in praise of the bee, and it may legitimately be asked why any one should take the trouble to repeat a story so much better told by M. Maeterlinck and many others. I can only reply that it is necessary for an attack to be effective to be fair, and that without some statement of what can be said in the bee's

favour it would be impossible to justify her condemnation as an awful example. Let us look now at the case against the bee, a case which, like those of other criminals, is certainly not weakened by evidence of general intelligence. The bee is the most out-and-out Socialist existing in the world, and in the thoroughness with which she has carried out her principles she puts Karl Marx and all his tribe to shame. Presumably the primeval bees lived the ordinary family life of God-fearing insects, for their existing polity is far too highly organized to be primitive. How the revolting daughters managed to acquire all the power for themselves, or why they revolted, it is extremely unlikely we shall ever know. Possibly there is some hymenopterous equivalent for the vote. But however it was done and whatever the cause, get it they certainly did, and the family became a strictly communistic State. Individualism was wholly and, as it would seem, finally rejected by the honey-bee, the life and happiness of the individual bee ceased to have any importance, and the welfare of the hive became, not only the chief, but the only thing worth consideration. There is something rather fine about that, and we may if we please figure to ourselves the delight of the apostles of the new heaven and the new hive as their doctrines spread through beedom and began to be put in practice.

Once started upon this path, the bees found themselves in the grip of a logic as remorseless as that of MM. Lenin and Trotsky, and a nice pickle it brought them into at last. It is in the domain of sex that the results are most obviously astonishing. Work for the hive being the only thing worth serious thought, and sex being a notoriously perturbing circumstance, it was decided to get rid of it as far as possible, and this was done so thoroughly

that in the worker bees, who compose the vast majority of the population in any normal hive, the sex organs have been almost entirely eliminated. The first consequence of the adoption of Bolshevik principles was to force nine bees out of ten into permanent sterility, which, from the point of view of the individual bee, must, one would think, be somewhat regrettable.

It is a most extraordinary thing that though people have been studying bees for ages nobody knows now what the government of the hive really is. The one thing we know positively is that the insect we call the queen has no authority whatever. She is a fat, good-tempered body with much less intelligence than the workers, and is, in fact, nothing but a highly specialized slave to be employed as long as she is useful, and to be unhesitatingly sacrificed as soon as her usefulness comes to an end. Incidentally it is worth while to point out that, in their passion for a perfect Socialism, the worker bees will not allow two queens to meet without fighting to the death. One queen is enough for the hive, and since they are resolved to have the most vigorous available they egg on the queens to fight, and if one tries to get away press round her and compel her to continue the conflict. In connexion with these quarrels of the queens there are some most extraordinary but quite well-attested facts. One queen can only kill another by plunging her sting, which she never uses as a weapon against anything else, into the spiracles of the abdomen. It sometimes happens that in the struggle between two adult queens each is in a position to inflict this fatal stab upon her rival, and when that occurs they spring apart with every symptom of ungovernable terror. If both were killed the hive might be left queenless, and this is about

the only instance I can discover in which the Socialism of the bee operates to save the life of an individual. As one might perhaps expect, this deviation into mercy has its corrective. The pupa of a working bee while in the cell is covered with a fairly stout silken shroud. In the pupa of a queen bee this shroud only extends over the upper part of the insect, leaving the abdomen bare, so that when the adult queen starts upon her horrible tour of assassination, and tears open the cells in which the young queens are being reared, she finds nothing to impede the deadly thrust in the spiracles. Conceive a Socialism so remorseless that it actually provides for the very babies being clothed in the way which allows of their being most easily killed when their lives seem of no more value to the State!

Whatever it be that governs the hive, it cannot, I think, be simply inherited instinct. No doubt that would account for many of the proceedings of the bees, but it is hard to believe that all can be explained in this way. The gathering of honey, the swarming, and so forth, may be purely instinctive, but there are plenty of other facts in bee-life which seem to demand an intelligent authority. Is it, for instance, instinct alone which suddenly persuades, not a few, but all the workers in the hive, that they have had enough of their queen, and makes them combine respectfully but quite relentlessly to "ball" her to death? Could the extraordinary division of labour be instinctive? Some bees are sent out to gather pollen, some are put on to the manufacture of wax, some to that of varnish, some to nursing and feeding the young, and some to ventilating the hive by agitating their wings for what appear to be regular watches which they take in turn. Now this last is the most exhausting work a bee can undertake, and it seems almost impossible

to imagine that a worker, left to her own devices and not acting under orders, would be induced by instinct to carry out this tedious duty while other bees were revelling, as they most obviously do, in their work in the sunshine outside.

In 1914 our own stock became very weak and was eventually destroyed by wasps. As there was a good deal of splitting in the neighbourhood we decided to leave the hives empty for the time being and not to restock until conditions improved. In the following spring a very curious thing happened. Single bees came from time to time and inspected one of the vacant hives. Apparently the inspection was satisfactory, for these scouts were followed by little bands of housemaids who carried out the most thorough spring-cleaning that can be imagined. Our old gardener, wise in bee lore, prophesied that presently the hive would be tenanted again, and sure enough a swarm arrived in May, settled on a currant-bush, and patiently waited to be inducted with the proper ceremonies into the home they had chosen. Now could that be inherited instinct? Personally speaking, I think that one is almost driven to the conclusion that the bee community is ruled by some sort of Committee, or Soviet of the workers, but how the Soviet is chosen, or what are the qualifications for membership, are unsolved mysteries. All one can be certain of is that only workers have seats on the Board, and that, if it exists at all, as many experienced bee-masters firmly believe, it is from our point of view one of the most diabolically cruel institutions in all nature. There is one hint as to the composition of this Soviet which might be worth following up. At the door of the hive there are always the guards and the fanners, but there are also other bees which appear to remain continually at home and to exercise some sort of con-

trol over the scurrying masses of their fellows. Possibly these are members of the Committee on duty: possibly they are the trusted executive officers of that secret authority.

Most people know that there are amazing problems connected with the queen bee, that, for instance, she is only fertilized once in her life, and that the eggs of a virgin queen hatch out, but produce only drones. For our present purpose we may, however, dismiss these strange facts and consider only how Bolshevism has affected her mate. Presumably the drone was once an average male creature, able to feed himself and to get through an ordinary day's work. Female suffrage and Socialism have been the ruin of him, and he has hopelessly degenerated under a system which has transferred all serious work and all responsibility to his sisters. He has become entirely dependent on them, and so long as they tolerate him at all they treat him with good-natured but harmless contempt. In effect he is a genial, roystering drunkard whose periods of debauch and sleep are only interrupted in the ordinary way by aimless merrymakings in the sunshine. But the poor wretch pays dearly for his fun. When the queen goes forth upon her nuptial flight some madness seizes all the drones in the neighbourhood, and they chase her in a jostling crowd, apparently oblivious of the fact that the successful drone, the winner in this lunatic competition, receives a particularly dreadful form of death as the prize. Still there is no accounting for tastes, and if the drone entertains the opinion that the world is well lost for love, it is his own business, and nobody has any right to quarrel with his peculiar point of view. It is not his fate, but that of his brothers which worries me when I contemplate the hive, with its ideal Socialism, a Socialism carried to the extremes of

Bolshevism. There comes a time in mid-July when the honey-flow has almost ceased, and when the Soviet decides to get rid of the *bouches inutiles*. Orders go forth to turn out the drones, and in the observation hive the wretched insects can be seen bolting down the various passages in the vain hope of escaping their pursuers. From the hive there arises a strange sobbing cry, unmistakable to any one who has ever heard it once, as clearly the note of terror and despair as any sound can be. Almost everybody has seen one of these expulsions of the drones, but not everybody has marked the incidents which accompany it. The workers throw themselves on the drones with savage fury, but they never sting them. It would not be economic. Stings might be lost if they were used in the business, and they are far too valuable to be risked in giving the drones a merciful death. The workers drag the drone to the footboard, and then, if they can, bite off one of his wings before dropping him over. That from the workers' admirably Bolshevik standpoint settles the drone's hash in the most satisfactory way. He cannot possibly get back into the hive, and the certainty that, if some benevolent toad does not snap him up—and toads keep a wary eye on bee-hives at most times—he will die miserably of cold and starvation does not trouble them in the least. Even the drones which escape with wings intact can only expect the same fate, for they cannot feed themselves, and when they feel the night chills have no more sense than to make repeated and always unsuccessful attempts to return to the hive which will never admit them again. To the Bolshevik bees the drones represent the idle rich, the leisured class, and being much more logical, and

one might add more intelligent Socialists than their human counterparts, they make such use of this class as they can before applying to it the more conspicuously Bolshevik principles.

There is much to admire in the Bolshevik bee. She is almost hideously industrious and quite uncannily intelligent on her own lines. To her liking for colour, and to her most fortunate but entirely inexplicable habit of never mixing the pollen of different flowers except in the hive, we owe most of the beauty of our gardens, though her fondness for a particularly acrid shade of magenta rather discounts her taste. But when all is said and done, it is impossible to disguise the fact that the honey-bees as a race have gone wrong. They committed all government to unsexed females, with the result that they are now enmeshed in a web of Socialism spun with that maddeningly remorseless logic which has been noticed in similar types among other tribes than theirs. They have sacrificed the happiness of the individual, and shortened their own lives, for the worker bee, who can live as long as six months, usually dies of sheer overwork in less than as many weeks. They have developed a disgusting callousness; they are by no means always honest; they are not infrequently violently aggressive towards other communities; and they have become so imbued with the worship of their Socialistic State that they go on working themselves to death to pile up wealth for the community even when, as in the case of those notorious bees inhabiting the Marble Rocks on the Nerbudda, its riches are far more than all the members could ever hope to spend.

There is a moral here somewhere if one could think of it.—*The National Review*.